

Why study EU foreign policy at all? A response to Keuleers, Fonck, and Keukeleire

Citation for published version (APA):

Dijkstra, H., & Vanhoonacker - Kormoss, S. (2017). Why study EU foreign policy at all? A response to Keuleers, Fonck, and Keukeleire. *Cooperation and Conflict*, 52(2), 280–286.
<https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716682393>

Document status and date:

Published: 01/06/2017

DOI:

[10.1177/0010836716682393](https://doi.org/10.1177/0010836716682393)

Document Version:

Publisher's PDF, also known as Version of record

Document license:

CC BY

Please check the document version of this publication:

- A submitted manuscript is the version of the article upon submission and before peer-review. There can be important differences between the submitted version and the official published version of record. People interested in the research are advised to contact the author for the final version of the publication, or visit the DOI to the publisher's website.
- The final author version and the galley proof are versions of the publication after peer review.
- The final published version features the final layout of the paper including the volume, issue and page numbers.

[Link to publication](#)

General rights

Copyright and moral rights for the publications made accessible in the public portal are retained by the authors and/or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

- Users may download and print one copy of any publication from the public portal for the purpose of private study or research.
- You may not further distribute the material or use it for any profit-making activity or commercial gain
- You may freely distribute the URL identifying the publication in the public portal.

If the publication is distributed under the terms of Article 25fa of the Dutch Copyright Act, indicated by the "Taverne" license above, please follow below link for the End User Agreement:

www.umlib.nl/taverne-license

Take down policy

If you believe that this document breaches copyright please contact us at:

repository@maastrichtuniversity.nl

providing details and we will investigate your claim.



Why study EU foreign policy at all? A response to Keuleers, Fonck and Keukeleire

Cooperation and Conflict

2017, Vol. 52(2) 280–286

© The Author(s) 2016



Reprints and permissions:

sagepub.co.uk/journalsPermissions.nav

DOI: 10.1177/0010836716682393

journals.sagepub.com/home/cac



Hylke Dijkstra and Sophie Vanhoonacker

Abstract

In an important article on the state of European Union (EU) foreign policy research, Keuleers, Fonck and Keukeleire show that academics excessively focus on the study of the EU foreign policy system and EU implementation rather than the consequences of EU foreign policy for recipient countries. While the article is empirical, based on a dataset of 451 published articles on EU foreign policy, the normative message is that it is time to stop ‘navel-gazing’ and pay more attention to those on the receiving end of EU foreign policy. We welcome this contribution, but wonder why certain research questions have been privileged over others. We argue that this has primarily to do with the predominant puzzles of the time. We also invite Keuleers, Fonck and Keukeleire to make a theoretical case for a research agenda with more attention to outside-in approaches. We conclude by briefly reflecting on future research agendas in EU foreign policy.

Keywords

European Union, foreign policy, research agenda, theory

Introduction

It is regularly observed that more academics study European Union (EU) foreign policy than there are civil servants to make it work.¹ In their contribution to *Cooperation and Conflict*, Keuleers et al. (2016) now show that a large proportion of these academics primarily examine what those civil servants do.

Based on a dataset of 451 articles on EU foreign policy, published in key journals between 2010 and 2014, they identify three research approaches: first, the ‘inward-looking’ approach which focuses on the EU foreign policy system itself; second, the ‘inside-out’ approach which assesses the implementation of EU foreign policy; and third, the ‘outside-in’ approach which analyses the consequences of EU foreign policy for recipient

Corresponding author:

Hylke Dijkstra, Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences, Maastricht University, P.O. Box 616,
6200 MD Maastricht, The Netherlands.

Email: h.dijkstra@maastrichtuniversity.nl

countries. They find that academic work is ‘rife with EU-centric research questions’ (Keuleers et al., 2016: abstract) and that the outside-in approach accounts for less than 20 per cent of publications (Keuleers et al., 2016: figure 2).² While their article is empirical, the normative message is that it is time to stop ‘navel-gazing’ (Keuleers et al., 2016: title) and pay more attention to those on the receiving end of EU foreign policy.

We are the (co-)authors of 8/192 articles classified in their dataset as inward-looking. Our purpose here is not to defend our own perspective. We would like to build on the findings of Keuleers et al. (2016) to discuss *why certain research questions have been privileged over others*. In other words, why is it that so many scholars have decided to focus on ‘agenda setting, policy formulation and decision-making’ (Keuleers et al., 2016: 348). We argue that this has primarily to do with the predominant puzzles of the time. Secondly, we invite Keuleers et al. (2016) to make a theoretical case for a research agenda with more attention for outside-in approaches. We conclude by briefly reflecting on future research agendas in EU foreign policy.

Why all the navel-gazing?

Academic debates are generally driven by puzzles which inform research questions. To answer these questions, scholars develop and make use of theories. It is worth exploring what the puzzles and theories have been in EU foreign policy research. In order to understand research choices, particularly in the period 2010–2014, it is helpful to look at the broader scholarly debate since the 1960s.

In an article which reflects on ‘the end of International Relations theory’ Dunne et al. (2013: 412–413) identify three key drivers behind theoretical development and academic research. First, they note that new theories get invented ‘in light of a general perception on the part of the academic community that a new historical context requires new conceptual tools of analysis’ (Dunne et al., 2013: 412). Looking at the academic debate since the establishment of European Political Cooperation in 1970, it is indeed the case that EU foreign policy research cannot be understood independently from the international context. The discussions on Civilian Power Europe were prominent during a period of *détente* in the 1970s (Duchêne, 1973). The actorness debate was critical in the 1990s when the EU launched the Common Foreign and Security Policy and made an attempt to develop its own international voice (Allen and Smith, 1990; Jupille and Caporaso, 1998). The Normative Power Europe debate emerged when it became increasingly clear that the role of the EU’s crisis management role would mainly be civilian rather than military in nature (Manners, 2002).

A second driver for ‘theoretical proliferation’, identified by Dunne et al. (2013: 413), is ‘the practice of “importing” a theory from a cognate discipline’. Once again, EU foreign policy is no exception. In the early years of European foreign policy cooperation scholars used international relations theory to explain why foreign policy integration did not occur (Bull, 1982; Hoffmann, 1966; Waltz, 1979: 152). When it did appear that EU foreign policy was becoming increasingly significant scholars started using meso-level theories from cognate fields. By the late-1990s and early-2000s, Europeanisation and governance theories, building on institutionalist theories and imported from EU public policy, gradually found their way to foreign policy scholars (Dijkstra, 2008; Duke and

Vanhoonacker, 2006; Juncos and Pomorska, 2006; Manners and Whitman, 2000; Smith, 2004; Tonra, 2001; Wong, 2005).

Finally, as Dunne et al. (2013: 413) note, ‘theoretical proliferation can be located in the developments within the discipline itself’. This also seems relevant for EU foreign policy. One only needs to point to the ‘Europe as a power’ debate. Following the keynote article by Manners (2002), scholars have proposed a wide range of adjectives: from realist to ethical and market power Europe (Aggestam, 2008; Damro, 2012; Hyde-Price, 2006). This has been a theoretical debate within the EU foreign policy research. The finding that the EU as a non-state actor has a degree of actorness has likewise triggered extensive theoretical debate (Bretherton and Vogler, 1999; Groenleer and Van Schaik, 2007; Hill, 1993; Jupille and Caporaso, 1998).

With these three drivers in mind, it should not come as a surprise that so many scholars have focused on institutional questions (inward-looking approach) and implementation questions (inside-out approach) during the 2010–2014 timeframe analysed by Keuleers et al. (2016). The Treaty of Lisbon of 2009 was a historic leap forward in terms of the EU-level diplomatic system with the High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy, the European External Action Service and the EU delegations. It posed a major research puzzle: never before did we witness such a centralisation of diplomatic resources in a non-state actor. It is thus hardly surprising that many scholars studied these new developments (Dijkstra, 2013; Juncos and Pomorska, 2013; Spence and Bátora, 2015; Vanhoonacker and Pomorska, 2013). The development of a European-level diplomatic system furthermore gave a new impulse to the use of concepts and insights of public administration (Henockl, 2014; Vanhoonacker et al., 2010).

During the 2010–2014 period scholars furthermore systematically tested – including through cross-case comparisons – theoretical approaches developed during earlier periods. Among others, at least two special issues of the *Journal of European Public Policy* and *International Relations*, were published on actorness with a view of driving this concept forward (Da Conceição-Heldt and Meunier, 2014; Niemann and Bretherton, 2013). Normative power was also critically analysed in a special issue of *Cooperation and Conflict* (Nicolaidis and Whitman, 2013). The period from 2010 to 2014 also included an authoritative volume on the Europeanisation of national foreign policy (Wong and Hill, 2011). In other words, while scholars generated theories of EU foreign policy during the 2000s, they tested them during the early-2010s.

The academic relevance of foreign policy analysis

Our argument thus far has been that puzzles and theories drive academic research in the area of EU foreign policy. This helps us to explain why scholars have privileged inward-looking and inside-out approaches. The big question is how the outside-in perspectives fit in. In this section, we suggest that if Keuleers et al. (2016) want to encourage the development of such an alternative outside-in approach, it would be important to link this perspective to a well-defined research puzzle and relevant theoretical frames.

In their article, Keuleers et al. rely on the model of the policy cycle to make a distinction between the three approaches (Keuleers et al., 2016: 349–352). Journal articles about agenda-setting, policy-formulation and decision-making are coded as inward-looking.

The articles dealing with the implementation of EU foreign policy fit into the inside-out approach. Finally, articles on the impact and evaluation of EU foreign policy are all about outside-in perspectives. Keuleers et al. (2016) therefore use the policy cycle as a structuring device to provide a snapshot of the EU foreign policy discipline. Yet this presents several challenges.

First, research agendas on EU foreign policy do not necessarily have much to do with the policy cycle. Research on actorness, normative power, Europeanisation and governance, for instance, concerns mostly the *structure and institutions* of EU foreign policy; not the *actual policy* made within the system. While structure and institutions often impact on policy and behaviour, they are traditionally seen as different loci of academic research. We would actually argue that the policy cycle – and foreign policy analysis more generally – is a distinct approach in itself, which has also been imported from a cognate field (White, 2001). It is thus unclear why the policy cycle would be a useful structuring device for an academic literature which goes beyond policy-making.

Second, the policy cycle is mainly a heuristic device, as the authors recognise themselves, ‘limited by its descriptive character and lack of explanatory power, which means it can never be the sole conceptual foundation for a research project’ (Keuleers et al., 2016: 348). The 17 example research questions, which Keuleers et al. (2016: 349–350) identify on the basis of the policy cycle, indeed primarily deal with the ‘what’ and the ‘how’ rather than the ‘why’. Such research questions lack explanatory power and are not a solid basis for a full-fledged new research agenda.

We embrace academic pluralism and value the exchange between the worlds of academia and policy. It is, however, doubtful whether academic research on EU foreign policy is best served by descriptive policy questions on impact and evaluation. As research and journal articles are (and should be) largely about building and testing theories, a theoretically-informed case for the outside-in perspective – next to empirical and normative considerations (Keuleers et al., 2016: 360) – is indispensable for the outside-in approach to become an attractive driver for new research projects.

Towards future research agendas

Through their empirical analysis of a dataset of 451 articles, Keuleers et al. (2016) provide an interesting snapshot of the research agenda between 2010 and 2014. Against the background of the earlier mentioned three key drivers for academic research, the emphasis on inward-looking and inside-out questions is not surprising. By way of conclusion, we would like to briefly explore likely future research agendas.

Making predictions about the future is always risky business. Still if we continue to reason along the lines of Dunne et al. (2013), with their emphasis on the importance of the historical context for the academic research agenda, it is quite likely that the rapidly changing geopolitical environment and the new tensions in Europe will result in new puzzles. At a moment of increased international uncertainty, scholars may turn their attention to the implications of this evolving global environment, conceptualised as a multi-polar, multi-partner, multi-culture or even multi-order world (Flockhart, 2016; High Representative, 2015; Petito, 2016). This changing context may also give rise to renewed attention for grand theories, more appropriate to deal with macro-level questions.

Second, scholars will likely continue to import theories from cognate disciplines. The so-called practice turn (Adler and Pouliot, 2011), for instance, shows considerable promise (e.g. Bicchi and Bremberg, 2016). The debate on the EU democratic deficit has been broadened to research on the legitimacy of EU foreign policy (Sjursen, 2011). A further significant development is the increasing embedding of academic research on EU foreign policy in other related areas such as security studies, conflict studies, international political economy, and area studies: this points in a direction whereby EU foreign policy is less seen as *sui generis* and more as mainstream.

Finally, as a field grows more mature, we see a more systematic empirical testing of theories, new variables introduced and scope conditions defined. Following Mearsheimer and Walt (2013), we are cautious about the promise of this development. As noted above, there is a risk that empirical analyses become detached from theories.

Acknowledgements

The authors would like to thank Floor Keuleers, Daan Fonck and Stephan Keukeleire for making their dataset available. They would also like to thank Karolina Pomorska for her suggestions.

Funding

The authors received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Notes

1. Robert Cooper (2005), a former advisor of Javier Solana used, for example, a variation in a speech.
2. Jørgensen (2015) also finds imbalances.

References

- Adler E and Pouliot V (2011) International practices. *International Theory* 3(1): 1–36.
- Aggestam L (2008) Introduction: ethical power Europe? *International Affairs* 84(1): 1–11.
- Allen D and Smith M (1990) Western Europe's presence in the contemporary international arena. *Review of International Studies* 16(1): 19–37.
- Bicchi F and Bremberg N (2016) European diplomatic practices: contemporary challenges and innovative approaches. *European Security* 25(4): 391–406.
- Bretherton C and Vogler J (1999) *The European Union as a Global Actor*. London: Routledge.
- Bull H (1982) Civilian power Europe: a contradiction in terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies* 21(2): 149–170.
- Cooper R (2005) Remarks to USEU-POLMIL Conference: ESDP Goals and Ambitions. Brussels, 12 October. Available at: <https://www.consilium.europa.eu/uedocs/cmsUpload/RobertCooper.pdf> (accessed 3 June 2016).
- Da Conceição-Heldt E and Meunier S (2014) Speaking with a single voice: the EU as an effective actor in global governance? *Journal of European Public Policy* 21(7): 961–979.
- Damro C (2012) Market power Europe. *Journal of European Public Policy* 19(5): 682–699.
- Dijkstra H (2008) The Council Secretariat's role in the common foreign and security policy. *European Foreign Affairs Review* 13(2): 149–166.
- Dijkstra H (2013) *Policy-Making in EU Security and Defense: An Institutional Perspective*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.

- Duchêne F (1973) The European Community and the uncertainties of interdependence. In: Kohnstamm M and Hager W (eds) *A Nation Writ Large? Foreign Policy Problems before the European Community*. Basingstoke: Macmillan, pp.1–21.
- Duke S and Vanhoonacker S (2006) Administrative governance in the CFSP: development and practice. *European Foreign Affairs Review* 11(2): 163–182.
- Dunne T, Hansen L and Wight C (2013) The end of International Relations theory? *European Journal of International Relations* 19(3): 405–425.
- Flockhart T (2016) The coming multi-order world. *Contemporary Security Policy* 37(1): 3–30.
- Groenleer M and Van Schaik L (2007) United we stand? The European Union's international actorness in the cases of the International Criminal Court and the Kyoto Protocol. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 45(5): 969–998.
- Henockl T (2014) The European External Action Service – torn apart between several principals or acting as a smart 'double agent'? A principal–agent analysis of the EU foreign policy bureaucracy. *Journal of Contemporary European Research* 10(4): 381–401.
- Hoffmann S (1966) Obstinate or obsolete? The fate of the nation-state and the case of Western Europe. *Daedalus* 95(3): 862–915.
- High Representative (2015) The European Union in a Changing Global Environment: A More Connected, Contested and Complex World. Brussels: EEAS. http://eeas.europa.eu/docs/strategic_review/eu-strategic-review_strategic_review_en.pdf (accessed 10 June 2016).
- Hill C (1993) The capability-expectations gap, or conceptualizing Europe's international role. *Journal of Common Market Studies* 31(3): 305–328.
- Hyde-Price A (2006) 'Normative' power Europe: a realist critique. *Journal of European Public Policy* 13(2): 217–234.
- Jørgensen KE (2015) The study of European foreign policy: trends and advances. In: Jørgensen KE, Kalland A, Drieskens E, et al. (eds) *The SAGE Handbook of European Foreign Policy*. London: SAGE Publications, pp.14–29.
- Juncos A and Pomorska K (2006) Playing the Brussels game: strategic socialisation in the CFSP council working groups. *European Integration online Papers* 10(11): 1–17.
- Juncos A and Pomorska K (2013) 'In the face of adversity': explaining the attitudes of EEAS officials vis-à-vis the new service. *Journal of European Public Policy* 20(9): 1332–1349.
- Jupille J and Caporaso J (1998) States, agency and rules: the European Union in global environmental politics. In: Rhodes C (ed.) *The European Union in the World Community*. Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, pp.213–229.
- Keuleers F, Fonck D and Keukeleire S (2016) Beyond EU navel-gazing: taking stock of EU-centrism in the analysis of EU foreign policy. *Cooperation and Conflict* 51(3): 345–364.
- Manners I (2002) Normative power Europe: a contradiction in terms? *Journal of Common Market Studies* 40(2): 235–258.
- Manners I and Whitman R (eds) (2000) *The Foreign Policies of European Union Member States*. Manchester: Manchester University Press.
- Mearsheimer J and Walt S (2013) Leaving theory behind: why simplistic hypothesis testing is bad for International Relations. *European Journal of International Relations* 19(3): 427–457.
- Nicolaïdis K and Whitman R (eds) (2013) Special issue on normative power Europe. *Cooperation and Conflict* 48(2).
- Niemann A and Bretherthon C (eds) (2013) EU external policy at the crossroads: the challenge of actorness and effectiveness. *International Relations* 27(3).
- Petito F (2016) Dialogue of civilizations in a multipolar world: toward a multicivilizational-multiplex world order. *International Studies Review* 18(1): 78–91.
- Sjursen H (2011) Not so intergovernmental after all? On democracy and integration in European foreign and security policy. *Journal of European Public Policy* 18(8): 1078–1095.

- Smith ME (2004) *Europe's Foreign and Security Policy: The Institutionalization of Cooperation*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press.
- Spence D and Bátora J (eds) (2015) *The European External Action Service: European Diplomacy Post-Westphalia*. Basingstoke: Palgrave Macmillan.
- Tonra B (2001) *The Europeanisation of National Foreign Policy: Dutch, Danish and Irish Foreign Policy in the European Union*. Aldershot: Ashgate.
- Vanhoonacker S, Dijkstra H and Maurer H (2010) Understanding the role of bureaucracy in the European security and defence policy: the state of the art. *European Integration online Papers* 14: 1–33.
- Vanhoonacker S and Pomorska K (2013) The European External Action Service and agenda-setting in European foreign policy. *Journal of European Public Policy* 20(9): 1316–1331.
- Waltz K (1979) *Theory of International Politics*. Reading, MA: Addison-Wesley.
- White B (2001) *Understanding European Foreign Policy*. Basingstoke: Palgrave.
- Wong R (2005) The Europeanization of foreign policy. In: Hill C and Smith M (eds) *International Relations and the European Union*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, pp.134–153.
- Wong R and Hill C (eds) (2011) *National and European Foreign Policies: Towards Europeanization*. London: Routledge.

Author biographies

Hylke Dijkstra is an Assistant Professor (with tenure) at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University, The Netherlands. He is also the Editor-in-Chief of *Contemporary Security Policy*. He focuses on the role of international organisations in the area of security and has previously published on the European Union, NATO and the United Nations.

Sophie Vanhoonacker is a Jean Monnet Professor and holds the Chair in Administrative Governance at the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences of Maastricht University, The Netherlands. She has served as Dean of the Faculty since January 2016. Her research focuses on the role and influence of the administrative level in EU decision making, in particular the emerging system of an EU level system of diplomacy and its processes of institutionalization.